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C O N F I D E N T I A L MANILA 003095

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINS](#) [KISL](#) [PINR](#) [RP](#)

SUBJECT: MUSLIM VIEWS ON MANILA'S POLITICAL CIRCUS

Classified By: Political Officer Joseph Saus for
Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary. Some moderate Muslims are looking beyond PGMA to a possible De Castro era. The ongoing circus has sparked renewed interest in a look at an independent Mindanao as part of a federal system. Muslim clerics may issue veiled attacks against PGMA on July 8. End Summary.

12. (C) Charge met July 6 with Amina Rasul, a close Embassy contact and Muslim civil society activist who is identified with the opposition. Rasul stressed "all eyes are on (Vice President) Noli De Castro," but she worried that he has even less capacity for leadership than PGMA, given that he has never served at the head of a large bureaucracy. Rasul noted that PGMA is at least tempered by the Church and civil society, while De Castro has no such limiting factors. De Castro also is surrounded by a staff even more "ravenous" than PGMA's, according to Rasul.

13. (C) Recent calls for an independent Mindanao republic, as highlighted by outspoken and controversial Davao City Mayor Rodrigo Duterte, are reflective of Mindanao's disappointment with the ongoing political circus in Manila, Rasul said. Charge and Rasul agreed that Duterte -- a steady PGMA ally -- could also be warning the opposition that unrelenting confrontation with Malacanang could prompt national disintegration. On this issue, Rasul opined that a federalist system could be the happy medium between the status quo and secession. Charge noted that the USG strongly opposed any attempts at secession in the Philippines. Regarding the situation in Manila, he also stated USG support for transparency and accountability, but also he emphasized the importance of following the Constitution.

14. (C) She provided Charge with copies of a sermon that several muftis (clerics) will deliver across Mindanao on July 8 during Friday prayers. The sermon's broad themes -- which are not supportive of PGMA -- dwell on safeguarding the public trust and include Koranic verses such as: "The signs of hypocrisy are three: When he speaks, he lies; when he promises, he reneges; and when he is entrusted (with something), he betrays it. Even he prays, fasts, and claims to be a Muslim (he is still a hypocrite)... When a leader starts thinking that he is special and that there is nobody else who can be in his position (the leader is already lost). He will soon become a dictator and will suppress all dissent..." Rasul also provided Charge a copy of a separate statement, signed by several muftis, in which PGMA is implored to be courageous and submit herself to the law. The document stresses that Islam is a religion of forgiveness, although "we cannot simply forgive and forget a crime if one has been committed against the public." The final paragraph requests PGMA to "face the music," and "be rid of lies and half truths," in order to set herself free and "deliver us from the political quicksand we have been led to."

15. (C) Comment: Rasul is active in Mindanao civil society and grass-roots efforts that showcase moderate Islam and the compatibility of Islam and democracy. While she makes no effort to hide her opposition links, her views are indicative of the general distrust of Manila harbored by many Filipino Muslims. In general, Muslims appear fed up with the political circus in "Imperial Manila," and are deeply worried about potential ramifications for the peace process and economic development plans for Mindanao, while also seeing this as a potential opportunity to advance agendas for federalism or even separatism. End Comment.

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